

CAVALCADE
OF COUNTIES:

THE VITAL BRIDGE

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New Brunswick with the Raritan in background. Rutgers Gymnasium, in center foreground, is near site of first football game. Span at left is

Pennsylvania R. R. Bridge with Albany Street Bridge beyond. The Delaware & Raritan Canal appears in the 1845 view of town pictured below.

Exceptional Transportation Facilities Make Middlesex a Land Span Between Great Cities

BY JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

JOHN INIAN'S vision possibly didn't extend much beyond the east and west banks of the Raritan River when he established a ferry at what is now New Brunswick in 1686. The fact remains that his ferry was the first exploitation of Middlesex County's ever-vital role as the connecting bridge between East and West Jersey, between New York and Philadelphia, between New England and the South.

Twentieth Century trains thundering over the county on the busiest stretch of railroad tracks in the world and principal highways stretching over Middlesex owe their origin to the same simple reason which prompted Inian's Ferry. It's an easy-to-demonstrate reason: Trace a straight line between New York and Philadelphia, and smack astride the line is Middlesex County, the necessary link.

Travelers on horseback had been fording the Raritan for nearly 30 years before John Inian arrived in 1681. The calm waters of Raritan Bay lured colonists off the stormy Atlantic, the placid Raritan River enticed them inland. English settlers from the Piscataqua River in Maine established Piscataway in the 1660s, at about the same time Woodbridge sprang into being.

COUNTY courts alternated between Piscataway and Woodbridge for seven years before Middlesex County was established officially in 1682 (with its loosely defined county borders includ-

ing most of Somerset County). Sprawling Woodbridge had 600 residents by that time, but the East Jersey Proprietors had their eyes on "sweet, wholesome and delightful" Ambo Point. They visualized it as the "London of the Western Hemisphere" (by reason of its "commodious situation upon a safe harbor").

Three buildings graced Ambo Point by August, 1683, but real growth began two years later when the Earl of Perth permitted 200 oppressed Scots to immigrate to the Point. Gratefully the Scots dubbed the village "New Perth"; reluctantly older Ambo Point residents gave ground in the compromise name of "Perth Amboy."

MIDDLESEX COUNTY'S "bridge" character began to emerge in 1686, when Perth Amboy became the provincial capital of East Jersey. That necessitated communication with Burlington, capital of West Jersey, and led to the gradual widening of Indian paths into roads across the narrow waist of New Jersey. Two roads traversed the length of Middlesex—the "Upper" road going to Princeton and Trenton via Inian's Ferry, the "Lower" road extending from South Amboy to Burlington via Cranbury.

Meanwhile the Raritan River led Dutch settlers westward to Hunterdon County. Some of those Dutch stopped off in New Brunswick early in the 18th Century—and renamed the main street "Albany" street to honor the



New York town from whence they came. The struggling little river town became "New Brunswick" officially in 1730, ending years of casual designation (ranging from "Pridmore's Swamp" to "Inian's Ferry" to "The River").

Perth Amboy grew steadily, but its future suffered a setback in 1747 when Governor Belcher arrived in town, apparently to live there as had most Royal Governors before him. Governor Belcher delivered himself movingly: " * * * I have hardly ever seen a place more eloquently situated * * * and you may depend on everything on my part to render it a flourishing town * * * " Then he went to live in Elizabethtown.

HOWEVER, as the colonies moved toward an open split with England in 1776, Governor William Franklin established his residence at Perth Amboy. On the night of June 15, 1776, Col. Nathaniel Heard of the Continental Army knocked on Franklin's door to present him with a parole. Franklin had his choice—either sign the parole and sit out the impending war in a town which Franklin could choose or submit to arrest. The Governor scorned the parole; Heard placed him under arrest.

Middlesex County played a more or less unwilling host to Lord Howe's British army from December 2, 1776, to June 22, 1777. Patriotic feeling

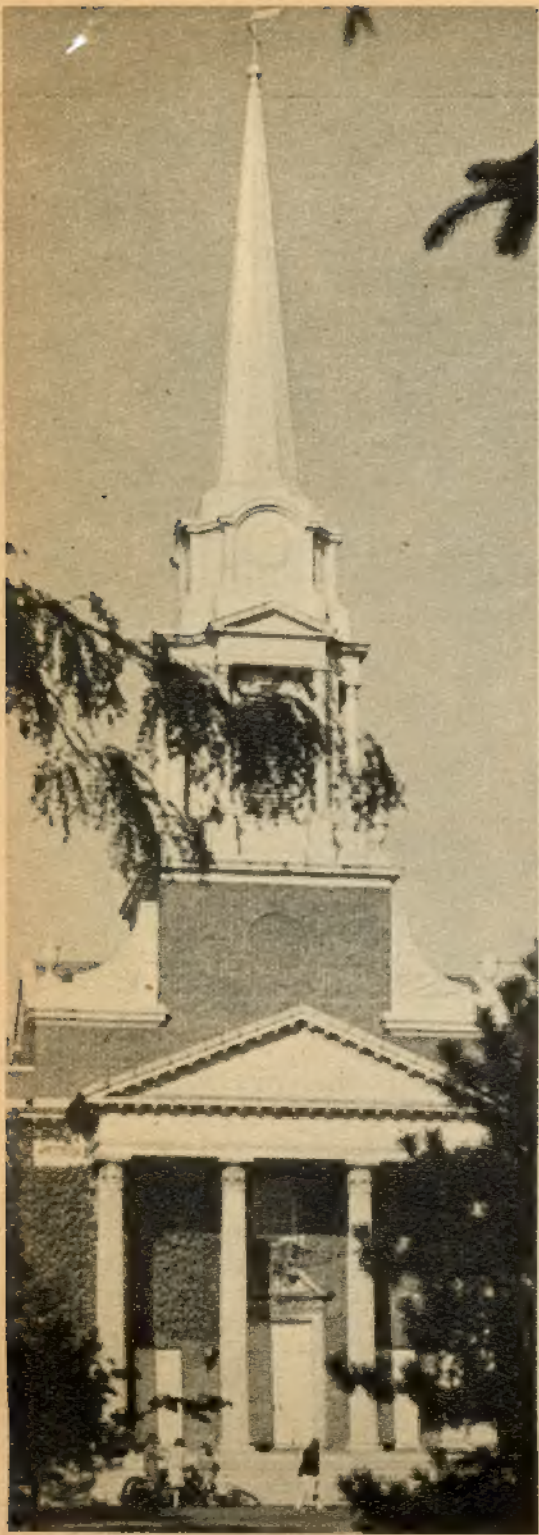
dominated the Raritan and produced such heroes as Col. John Neilson, yet it didn't keep between 200 and 300 adults from flocking into New Brunswick each day in the dark December of 1776 to accept Howe's offer of amnesty in return for a renunciation of revolutionary feelings.

Howe found his position untenable in the late Spring of 1777 after Gen. Washington moved his troops from Morristown to the southern slope of the Watchung Mountains. After trying unsuccessfully to lure Washington's army out of the hills, Howe broke camp on June 22 and moved on to Perth Amboy and Staten Island. The British burned and pillaged as they went, adding to the suffering Middlesex County had already endured. No savage battles raged over the country, yet more than 100 buildings were burned and the British ransacked 650 other homes.

THE county saw little direct warfare after 1777, but Washington brought his troops to New Brunswick after the Battle of Monmouth in June, 1778. Then, on August 29, 1781, the general dramatically and unexpectedly wrote in New Brunswick the orders which took his army to Yorktown for the decisive victory over Cornwallis.

New Brunswick edged to the fore as the county's center and met only token opposition when county courts transferred there in 1778. Elsewhere in

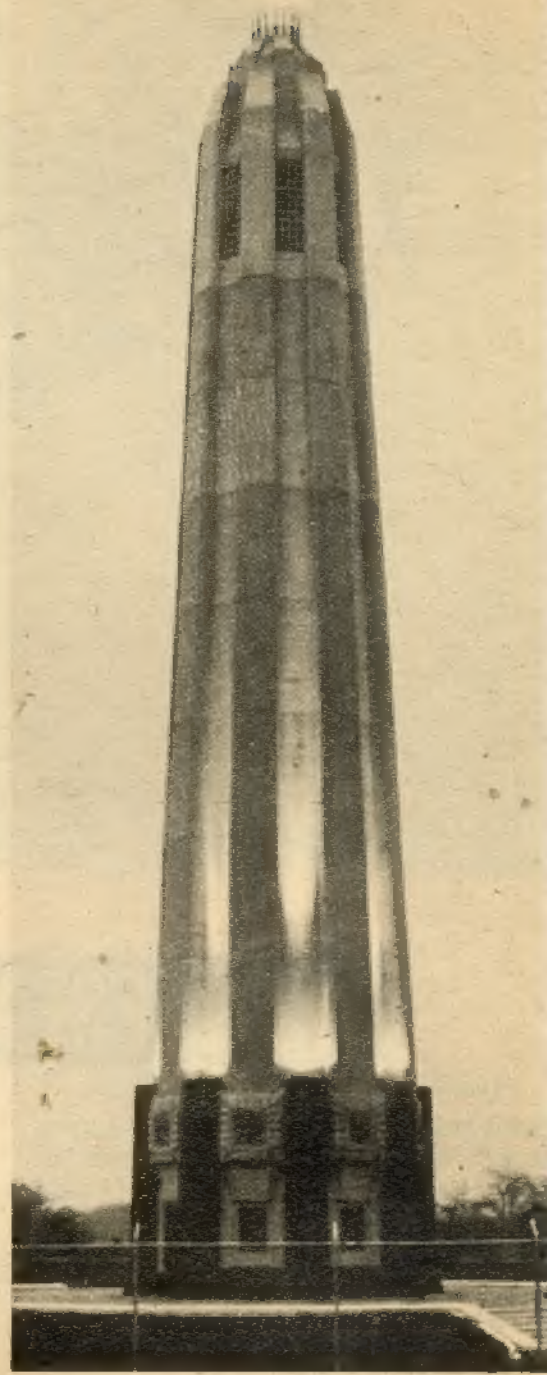
This is the twelfth of a series of articles dealing with New Jersey's 21 counties, sketching their past and present with, now and then, a peek into their future. The counties will be considered in alphabetical order each week. Next Sunday: Monmouth County.



Chapel at New Jersey College for Women in New Brunswick.



Ivy-covered "Old Queens," built in 1808, is the oldest building at Rutgers, chartered in 1766, on the banks of the Old Raritan. In 1869 the "Queensmen" and the "Tigermen" of nearby Princeton met (below) in the nation's first intercollegiate football game.



Edison Tower at Menlo Park marks the inventor's work.

Middlesex in the waning days of the 18th Century a few potteries began to utilize the rich clay beds underlying Middlesex County soil in a wide arc from Woodbridge to Cheesequake. Most of South Middlesex depended on huge lumber and timber shipments, although farmers along the Manalapan Creek found the Indian word for the creek—meaning "good country producing good bread"—correctly characterized the region.

ANY prosperity in the county didn't help Queen's College, the struggling little institution the Dutch Reformed Church had established on the banks of the Old Raritan in 1771 (on charters granted in 1766 and 1770). Its beginnings were inauspicious enough with one tutor, 18-year-old Frederick Frelinghuysen. The first class, in 1774, had one graduate.

At least the college could move easily, and it did during the Revolution—first to Millstone, then North Branch before returning to New Brunswick in 1778. Acute financial pains closed the college from 1795 to 1807, again from 1821 to 1825.

Finally the trustees announced in 1825 that the college would reopen as Rutgers College. "Queen's," they pointed out, had become unpatriotic as a result of the Revolution—but any one who believed the change had been induced more by the generosity of New York philanthropist Col. Henry Rutgers than by patriotism wouldn't have been far wrong.

THE plight of poor Rutgers failed to loosen the bulging purses in thriving New Brunswick, where more than 5,000 people lived by 1830. Life surged vividly in the town's 20 taverns and many hotels. Down on the river a dozen fast sloops stood by awaiting grain from Hunterdon, Somerset and Warren counties. Twice a week long

lines of massive grain wagons, drawn by up to six horses, rolled over the New Jersey Turnpike (Easton to New Brunswick) to shipside. Often as many as 50 wagons lined up in Water street overnight while the waterfront erupted in the sound and strife in the taverns and rough hotels for traders. (An nearly historian said the difference between New Brunswick's trader hotels and its hotels for overland travelers was that travelers wanted rest.)

Quantities of peaches also cleared through New Brunswick, but that trade centered in Washington (now South River) under the leadership of Samuel Whitehead Sr. Samuel set out peach trees in the early 1820s and became so successful that farmers for miles around emulated him. From four to six peach-laden steamers left Washington daily for New York before declining crops ruined the business in the 1850s.

EVEN more important to all Middlesex, however, were the streams of people crossing between New York and Philadelphia. Perth Amboy, South Amboy, New Brunswick, Woodbridge and Washington all vied for the trade. Competition between steamship companies connecting New York and Middlesex County became fierce and at county ports stagecoach companies battled without quarter.

South Amboy had a dramatic battle for the business from 1806 to 1833 as

Samuel Gordon and Daniel Wilmurt "kept things hot between Amboy and Bordentown" with their rival routes. Particularly intense rivalry flared in New Brunswick, where the "Citizen's" and "Union" steamship lines scrapped for business. Whistling steamers rammed into New Brunswick docks, passengers (who took unto themselves the rivalries of the steamboat owners) risked life and limb by leaping ashore and sprinting for competing stagecoaches. Off they went up Burnet street in the swirling dust, with as many as 22 coaches jockeying for positions on the narrow street.

Down-county Middlesex towns cared little who got the up-county trade first because they got it eventually. Inns in Dayton, Rhode Hall, Cranbury and Kingston catered splendidly and rapidly to the cross-state transients. The pre-Revolutionary War Kingston House, for example, boasted of having as many as 49 stages waiting out front at once while more than 400 passengers dined or rested inside.

THE peach and grain trade and the colorful stagecoach era were doomed by the dawn of the canal and railroad age. Naturally Middlesex became the intermediary—the bridge—when the Delaware & Raritan Canal and the Camden & Amboy Railroad built across the narrowest part of the state in the 1830s. Steamboat operators continued to prosper for awhile until the

Camden & Amboy and the New Jersey Railroad (from Jersey City and Newark) joined tracks in New Brunswick in 1839.

Some of South Middlesex benefitted from the railroad, notably Jamesburg, and tremendous changes swept over the entire Raritan River area soon after the canal and railroad bridged the county. The Raritan carried the third largest tonnage of any river in the country, but New Brunswick port gained little from the trade passing her wharves.

HOWEVER, facilities afforded by the canal and railroad led to the quick rise of New Brunswick industry. Young Martin Howell opened a wall-paper factory on Water street in 1837, using canal water for power; Horace H. Day founded a rubber plant in 1839 and other companies took advantage of the ready supply of raw materials and anthracite coal.

Rubber became a prime industry in Middlesex County, mainly because of Christopher Meyer, who came from Newark in 1839 to set up Day's machinery. While Day continuously poured his money into the courts to protect himself during a protracted suit for alleged infringements of Charles Goodyear's vulcanizing process, Meyer set up effective competition in Milltown in 1844.

Eventually Meyer controlled Day's plant, too, as well as the Milltown factory and a New Brunswick hard rubber manufactory. Millions of boots, rubbers and the patented "Arctic" flowed from Middlesex in the Civil War era and immediately after.

AT about the same time the big North Middlesex clay industry edged into the industrial picture. Some use of the fine Raritan clay had been made earlier in small local potteries but two

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Camp Kilmer, processing center for Army and Air Force troops.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

(Continued from Preceding Page)

Frenchmen finally made clay big business in Woodbridge in 1825—when Michael Lefoulon and Henry De Casse started the Salamander Works, which in 20 years became the state's largest clay manufactory.

John R. Watson set up a fire-brick plant in Perth Amboy in 1836 and James Wood built brick kilns at Sayreville in 1851, although the important "big" names in those communities were Alfred Hall in Perth Amboy and Peter Fisher and James Sayre in Sayreville. Hall located in Perth Amboy in 1845 to make fire brick, but his greatest contribution came in the 1870s when he set up an extensive terra cotta plant.

QUICKLY Perth Amboy and the nearby area became the terra cotta center of the world, and Middlesex terra cotta is today found all over the world. Fisher and Sayre started their brick plant in 1851 and within 20 years made more than 22,000,000 bricks annually. That, plus the 8,000,000 manufactured each year by the James Wood Co., made Sayreville one of the nation's biggest brick producers.

Rutgers College, meanwhile, continued to struggle in the midst of plenty. The Class of 1862 had 38 graduates, but two years later Civil War vicissitudes cut the graduating class to 11 men and the college again faced

serious times. Three significant things occurred almost simultaneously to boost Rutgers toward both educational and academic solidity.

First, the state established on the Rutgers campus the Land Grant College of Agriculture and Mechanics in 1864 (as "The Scientific School"). Secondly, Rutgers in 1865 became non-sectarian. Finally, the intensive scholarship and endowment campaign of Rev. Dr. William H. Campbell raised \$144,758 in the closing days of the Civil War. By the 1870s the college began to attract some large endowments and establishment of the State Agricultural Experiment Station at the college in 1880 enhanced the college's reputation.

In fact, the school had shaken enough of its academic rigidity and its economic problems to encourage some campus lightheartedness. One result was the nation's first intercollegiate football game on the Rutgers campus on November 6, 1869, when visiting Princeton obligingly dropped a 6-4 decision after the rival schoolboys (25 on a side) trampled over one another. Four years later Howard N. Fuller ('74) wrote "On the Banks," the school's alma mater.

MIDDLESEX retained a distinctly rural air in the 1870s—even in the "cities." Perth Amboy, despite its brick yards, continued as a quaint village, where visitors came to enjoy the

"salubrious sea air." Woodbridge had a reputation as a Summer resort. Hundreds of men found employment in the big oyster beds in the healthful Raritan Bay off Perth Amboy. Then the Lehigh Valley Railroad, built from Easton to Perth Amboy in the 1870s, brought huge coal shipments into Perth Amboy and changed it overnight into a bustling industrial town. Population jumped from about 2,800 in 1870 to more than 7,000 in 1880.

THOMAS ALVA EDISON found rural peacefulness at Menlo Park, where in 1876 he set up the first laboratory in America devoted to research and invention. First, Edison devised a "talking machine," which in the Fall of 1877 repeated in Edison's own voice four lines of "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

Edison and his men turned to development of the incandescent light. The search for a workable filament turned, after hundreds of experiments, to ordinary cotton thread, and in October, 1879, a piece of carbonized thread glowed for 45 hours before the yellow loop dulled to gray. On New Year's Eve, 1879, 3,000 visitors came to Menlo Park on a special excursion to watch a demonstration of the light. Before Edison left Menlo Park for West Orange in 1887, the hilltop laboratory was the site of many other inventions—including an electric locomotive, which Edison operated at Menlo Park.

The rubber and wallpaper industries which buoyed New Brunswick through

the 19th Century began to slip as the 20th Century dawned, but New Brunswick had in the meantime welcomed Robert W. and James W. Johnson, who came in 1886 to establish their pioneer gauze and adhesive tape plant. The Johnsons started in the old Parsons Mill by the river at a time when antiseptic standards were virtually unknown; soon they had America reaching in time of emergency for a "red cross" box rather than a torn-up old sheet or towel.

Perth Amboy's industrial pattern spurted ahead in 1899 after the Raritan Copper Works started to refine copper in the city. Within a few years it became the world's largest copper refinery (and is still in 1952 one of the country's biggest). Milltown had a spurt, too, when the Michelin Tire Co. bought the old Meyer rubber works in Milltown in 1907 to make automobile tires. Michelin hired 3,000 people before it moved out in the late 1920s.

WORLD WAR I strengthened Middlesex County industries, of course, and fixed the pattern of the heavily industrial Raritan Bay area in sharp contrast to the sparsely settled regions south of New Brunswick and Milltown. Rubber and wallpaper enterprises, long important along the Raritan, moved away but other industries moved into the abandoned plants.

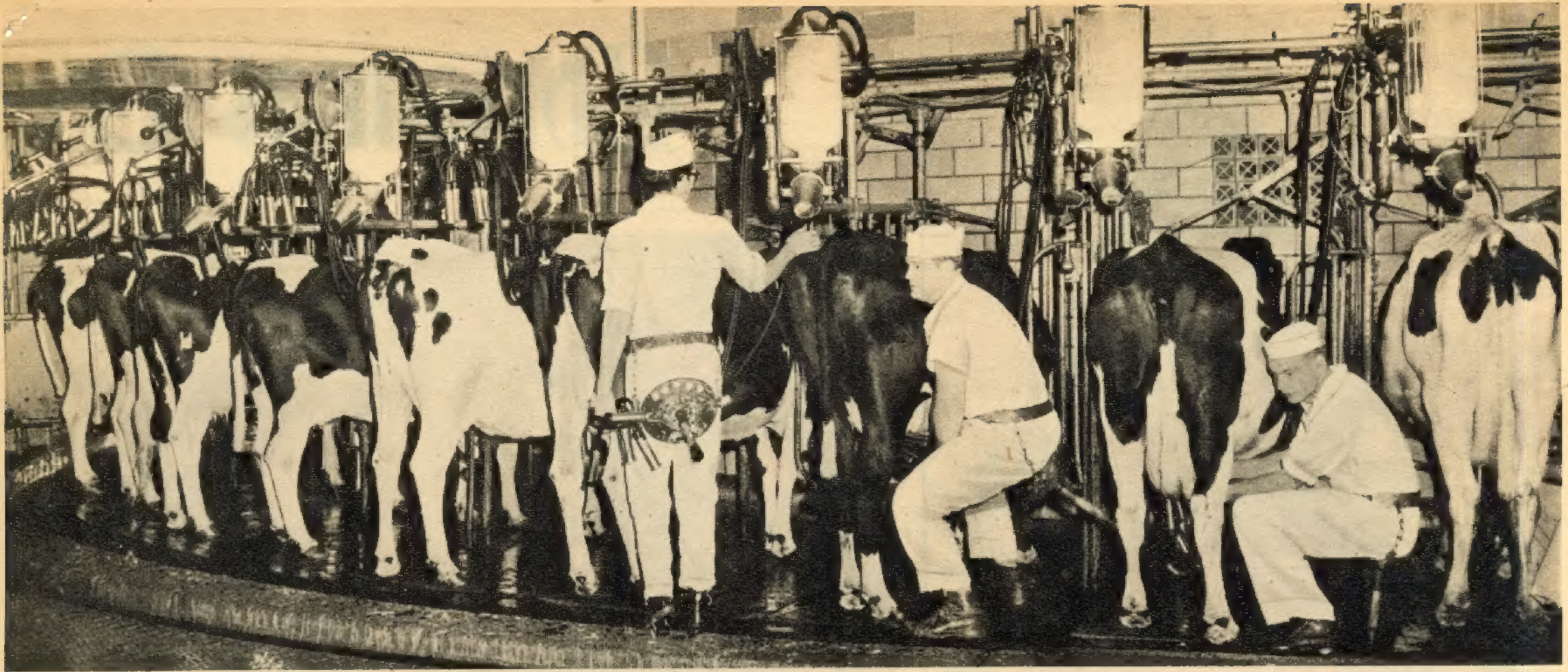
Small industry typifies Middlesex County today. Most of its more than 2,000 widely diversified plants employ fewer than 300 persons and some of



In rural Middlesex: Dayton, one of stops in stagecoach era . . .



. . . and Spotswood, with library at the foot of Manalapan road.



"Strippers" extracting last few ounces of milk from cows on the rotolactor at the Walker-Gordon dairy farm in Plainsboro.

them are unique—such as the George W. Holmes snuff factory in Helmetta, one of the nation's biggest snuff plants. Chemicals, primary metals, paints, explosives, clay, textiles and drugs are parts of the huge and varied pattern.

The pharmaceutical industry, by way of illustration, employs more than 4,600 persons in New Brunswick alone (split about evenly between Johnson & Johnson and E. R. Squibb). At Parlin, Hercules Powder Co. and du Pont have big plants. Piscataway has more than 2,600 employed in the Bakelite Co. factory, 2,000 work in Carteret for the U. S. Metals Refining Co. and the New Jersey Shipbuilding Co. employs 2,600 at Perth Amboy.

ONE facet of the Middlesex industrial growth in the last 20 years has been the building of ultramodern, handsomely landscaped structures to house such varied enterprises as Johnson & Johnson subsidiaries, automobile assembly plants and paint manufacturing.

Oddly enough, in view of the North Middlesex factory pattern, the county has more than 1,200 farms—averaging upwards of 55 acres apiece in size. The annual value of farm products approaches \$9,000,000, with the immense potato farms surrounding Cranbury an important factor (Middlesex is second only to Monmouth in the state in potato production). Several large dairy farms prosper in the southwestern part of the county.

Possibly no county has so neat a division of industry and farming along a more or less fixed line. Just as Middlesex serves in a transportation sense as the span between great cities, so

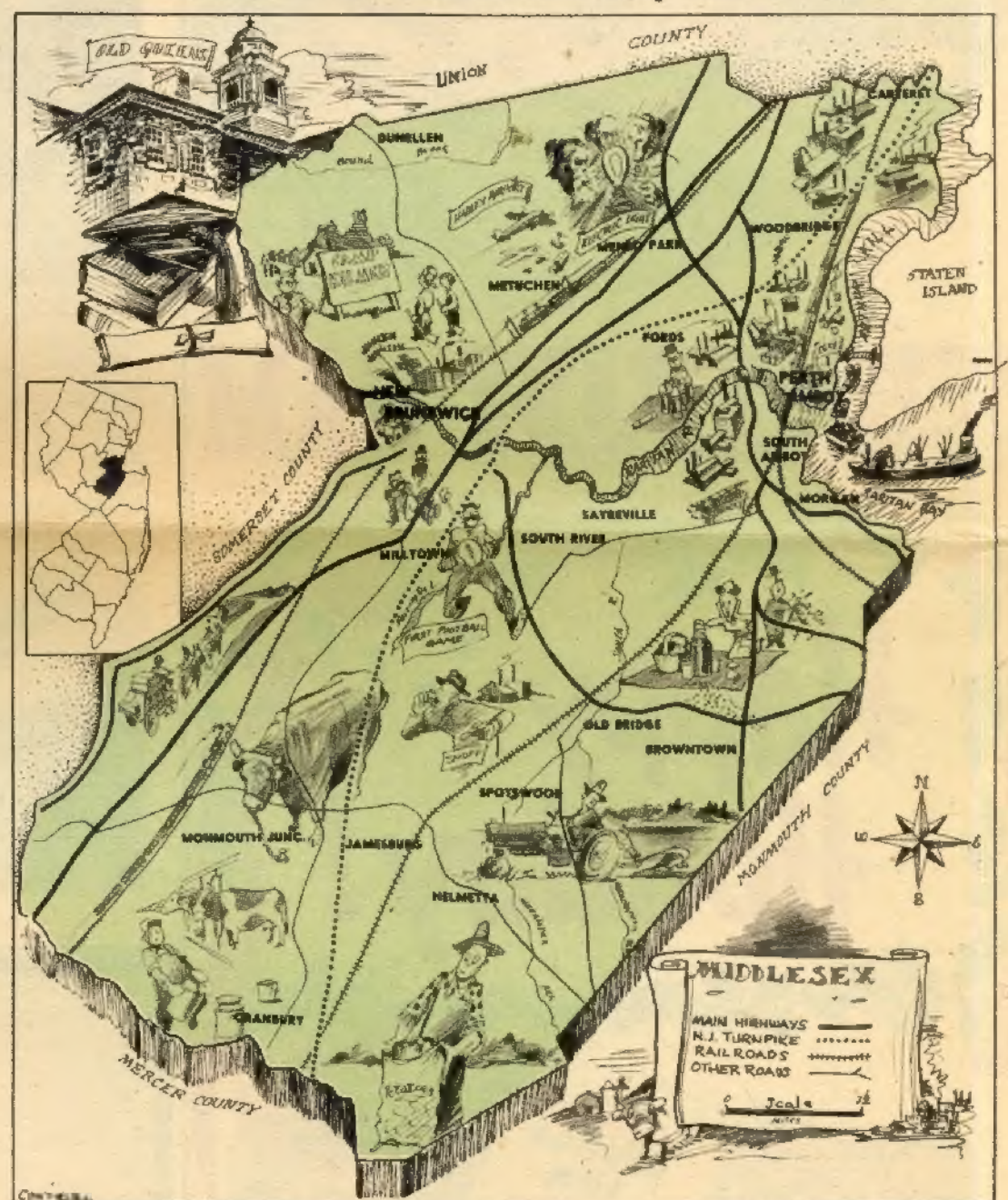
does the agricultural college of Rutgers University bridge the gap between town and country. From the College of Agriculture has come vital aid to the state's \$2,700,000 oyster industry, important developments in fruit and vegetable culture and in mosquito control. The searching in the soil also led to the discovery of streptomycin and neomycin at Rutgers—and to a 1952 Nobel Prize for Dr. Selman A. Waksman, one of Rutgers' most noted sons.

THROUGH all this, Rutgers has moved slowly toward the State University status it achieved in 1945. Establishment of state scholarships in 1890, the founding of New Jersey College for Women in 1918 and the adoption of the name "Rutgers University" in 1924 were important steps along the way.

Fittingly enough, two years after Rutgers became the State University, the state's first Constitutional Convention since 1844 met in Rutgers gymnasium to draft a new State Constitution. Its approval by voters in 1947 bridged a 103-year-old legislative gap.

Transportation agencies continue to make Middlesex County the vital bridge. The county's exceptional railroad and highway facilities made it an ideal location for Camp Kilmer during World War II. Now the New Jersey Turnpike bisects Middlesex in one direction; the Garden State Parkway is reaching to bisect it in another.

Often, on Summer days, traffic stalls completely on the banks of the Raritan. Blame it on geography—and the placement of New York City and Philadelphia in the 17th Century.



Industry and farming (below) are mainstays of Middlesex County.

